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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: A MONTH AFTER PIC - WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT
DIWANIYAH?

Classified By: PRT Diwaniyah Team Leader Robert Pitre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) Summary: Coalition Forces transferred authority in Diwaniyah (Qadisiyah) Province to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) on July 16 after months of negotiations, assessments, political maneuvering, and a last-minute weather delay. Though not always a certainty, the Polish-led Coalition Forces (CF) in Diwaniyah consistently pushed, prodded, and pulled the provincial government toward a mid-summer PIC date despite rumors of a transfer in April or May and, at times, not infrequent suggestions of September, October, and beyond from provincial governor and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) stalwart Hamid al-Khudari. During the weeks leading up to PIC and in the weeks since, the PRT has witnessed several changes in Diwaniyah, including restrictions imposed by the ISCI/Badr-run provincial government on contracts with Coalition-funded projects, increased reluctance of local officials to meet with Coalition personnel or PRT officers without the Governor's approval, and restrictions on media content. Other aspects of life in "the land of hospitality" have remained largely unchanged. End summary.

Security Situation Stable

12. (C/NF) The security situation in Diwaniyah has remained relatively calm throughout the past eight months due, in large part, to gains made during Operation Lion's Pounce, executed by Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) during the waning months of 2007 and the beginning of 2008. Though occasional spikes in acts of violence occur, apparently as a direct result of offenses against militant groups in surrounding provinces, the once-powerful Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) holds little sway in the province. The status quo is in stark contrast to last year's violence, which saw FOB Echo attacked on a sometimes-daily basis by rockets and mortars, and which witnessed the assassination of Diwaniyah's governor and police chief on August 11, 2007.

13. (C/NF) Despite periodic indirect fire (IDF) attacks on FOB Echo (the last on August 1, which caused the death of a U.S. civilian KBR contractor) and occasional improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on Coalition convoys, little militia activity is seen in the city of Diwaniyah or the province's outlying areas. Markets are open, shopkeepers are conducting business, streets are clogged with vehicular and foot traffic; the average citizen is not afraid or unable to venture out. ISF presence and visibility appear reduced since PIC and the PRT as well as CF have noted a decline in the cooperation received from Iraqi Police. There has also been a rash of civilian vehicles trying to enter or obstruct Coalition military convoys.

Local ISCI/Badr Government Restricting Access

14. (C/NF) In recent weeks the PRT has encountered greater difficulties when attempting to engage with provincial, district, and local officials. Though most were ready and

willing to freely meet with PRT officers earlier this year, the Governor,s new rules for engagement with Coalition personnel and PRT officials, established in July shortly before PIC transfer, have made engagements difficult and at times impossible. CF and PRT officials are no longer authorized to directly contact Directors or Directors General. Instead, a meeting request must be transmitted to the Governor,s Office for his clearance and authorization. With rare exception, provincial authorities who report to the Governor are accompanied by one of his senior aides for all meetings with Coalition personnel and PRT officials. Efforts to meet with some district and sub-district level officials have also been complicated due to the Governor,s insistence that he be at least informed of all meetings.

15. (C/NF) Opposition party members of the Provincial Council (both Da'wa branches, Sadrists, and Fadhila), perhaps the only officials immune to the Governor,s requirements, are willing to engage with PRT officials. They are, however, unable to counter ISCI,s majority on the PC and therefore often vote with ISCI on controversial issues instead of fighting a legislative battle they would be predestined to lose. A recent example of this phenomenon is the PC,s July 8 edict - which passed unanimously - that no contractors in the province could initiate or continue work on Coalition-funded projects without the provincial government,s permission. Another past example is the PC,s unanimous request that a journalist working for the Alhura television station be dismissed after filing and airing reports critical of the provincial government,s management of reconstruction projects.

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Media

16. (C/NF) In recent weeks the media outlets in Diwaniyah have either failed to obtain from provincial government sources information that could be considered critical of the government, or failed to report potentially critical information. PRT staff monitoring of local media has witnessed the conspicuous absence of several events that would have previously received coverage. These events include general criminal activities (such as murders in the provincial capital) and actions against CF (including the two most recent IDF attacks on FOB Echo). Provincial authorities have also pressured journalists to withhold their coverage of events that they would prefer be kept from the public, including a recent Communist Party demonstration. Alhura television correspondents were forced during the past month to cease filming at events in which the Governor was present, under threat of arrest.

Comment

17. (C/NF) While recent developments should not cause undue alarm, they are disconcerting. It is possible that this is nothing more than the provincial government flexing its muscles. However, much of this seems to be a return to the old Saddam-era way of doing things where all good and bad fortune flows from the head of government -- in this case Governor Khudari, the former head of Badr Corps and a staunch Iran supporter. Many people have told us about their anger and disappointment with the Council of Representatives for being unable to pass provincial elections legislation, since it means there is no hope of changing the current makeup of the provincial government. The delay plays into the hands of ISCI/Badr, giving them more time and resources to improve the delivery of services, or at least to convince the people that they are doing so -- and more time to work on dissatisfied sheikhs who can in turn instruct their members to vote ISCI. The post-PIC transfer environment in Diwaniyah is likely to continue ISCI,s dominance of the province for the foreseeable future. End comment.

